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Govt Launches Mission to Fight Air Pollution

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The Central government has launched a five-year action plan with a tentative target of 20-30% reduction in concentrations of **PM10 and PM2.5 by 2024**, with 2017 as the base year.

Unlike earlier initiatives which focussed largely on the national capital region, this is a comprehensive **pan-India** air pollution abatement **scheme for 102 cities**.

Highlights

- The plan includes **102 non-attainment cities**, across 23 states and Union territories, which were identified by Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) on the basis of their ambient air quality data between 2011 and 2015.

The **non-attainment cities** are those that have fallen short of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for over five years. These 'non-attainment cities' were marked by CPCB and were asked to implement 42 measures aimed at mitigating air pollution as part of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP).
- As part of the programme, the Centre also plans to scale up the **air quality monitoring network across India**. At least 4,000 monitors are needed across the country, instead of the existing 101 real-time air quality (AQ) monitors.
- The plan proposes a three-tier system, including real-time physical data collection, data archiving, and an action trigger system in all 102 cities, besides **extensive plantation plans**, research on **clean-technologies**, landscaping of major arterial roads, and **stringent industrial standards**.
- It also proposes **state-level plans of e-mobility** in the two-wheeler sector, rapid augmentation of charging infrastructure, stringent **implementation of BS-VI norms**, boosting public transportation system, and adoption of third-party audits for polluting industries.
- The states have been kept in the loop for implementation and **global multilateral agencies** brought in for technical support.
- The ministry will periodically review the progress of these components on the basis of

appropriate indicators, which will be evolved. However, it is not binding on the state governments as it is not a legal document.

- It will be operationalised through inter-sectoral groups, which include the ministries of road transport and highways, petroleum and natural gas, renewable energy, and urban affairs among others.

Criticism

- The pollution reduction target in these cities **are not 'legally binding'** on respective states.
- A reduction of merely 20-30% from 2017 level by 2024 will not be sufficient to bring the air quality at desired level, i.e. the targets under action plan are **less ambitious**.

Way Forward

- Although, the targets appear less ambitious, the **NCAP is envisaged to be dynamic and would continue to evolve** based on the additional scientific and technical information as they emerged.
- This is a welcome step as it was imperative to have measurable, focused and precise targets with clear timelines and demonstrable accountability towards public health, to succeed in this national-level initiative.